



Uveitis

Overview

Uveitis is a form of eye inflammation. It affects the middle layer of tissue in the eye wall (uvea).

Uveitis (u-vee-l-tis) warning signs often come on suddenly and get worse quickly. They include eye redness, pain and blurred vision. The condition can affect one or both eyes. It primarily affects people ages 20 to 50, but it may also affect children.

Possible causes of uveitis are infection, injury, or an autoimmune or inflammatory disease. Many times a cause can't be identified.

Uveitis can be serious, leading to permanent vision loss. Early diagnosis and treatment are important to prevent the complications of uveitis.

Symptoms

The signs, symptoms and characteristics of uveitis include:

- Eye redness
- Eye pain
- Light sensitivity
- Blurred vision
- Dark, floating spots in your field of vision (floaters)
- Decreased vision

Symptoms may occur suddenly and get worse quickly, though in some cases, they develop gradually. They may affect one or both eyes.

The uvea is the middle layer of tissue in the wall of the eye. It consists of the iris, the ciliary body and the choroid. The choroid is sandwiched between the retina and the sclera. The retina is located at the inside wall of the eye and the sclera is the outer white part of the eye wall. The uvea provides blood flow to the deep layers of the retina. The type of uveitis you have depends on which part or parts of the eye are inflamed:

- Iritis (anterior uveitis) affects the front of your eye and is the most common type.
- Cyclitis (intermediate uveitis) affects the ciliary body.

- Choroiditis and retinitis (posterior uveitis) affect the back of your eye.
- Diffuse uveitis (panuveitis) occurs when all layers of the uvea are inflamed.

In any of these conditions, the jelly-like material in the center of your eye (vitreous) can become inflamed and infiltrated with inflammatory cells.

When to seek medical advice

Contact your doctor if you think you have the warning signs of uveitis. He or she may refer you to an eye specialist (ophthalmologist). If you're having significant eye pain and unexpected vision problems, seek immediate medical attention.

Causes

In about half of all cases, the specific cause of uveitis isn't clear. If a cause can be determined, it may be one of the following:

- Eye injury or surgery
- An autoimmune disorder, such as sarcoidosis or ankylosing spondylitis
- An inflammatory disorder, such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis
- An infection, such as cat-scratch disease, herpes zoster, syphilis, toxoplasmosis, tuberculosis, Lyme disease or West Nile virus
- A cancer that affects the eye, such as lymphoma

Risk factors

People with changes in certain genes may be more likely to develop uveitis. In addition, a recent study shows a significant association between uveitis and cigarette smoking.

Complications

Left untreated, uveitis can cause complications, including:

- Glaucoma
- Cataracts
- Optic nerve damage
- Retinal detachment
- Permanent vision loss

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